

Serial No. 10/771,047 Page 2

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JAN 23 2009**IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Please replace the paragraph on page 5, line 29 with the following amended paragraph:

The ~~fibers bundles~~ 16 are grouped into a fiber bundle 34 for convenience. The fiber bundle 34 provides output to the spatial filter 12, which is implemented via a combining optical assembly in the present embodiment. The spatial filter 12 includes an array of beam-flattening optics 20, which include hexagonal beam-flattening collimating lens pairs 22 positioned to receive laser energy from each fiber 16. The hexagonal beam-flattening optics 22 are followed by a first collimating lens 24, a second collimating lens 26, and a feedback mirror 28, which are all part of the spatial filter 12. An aperture is positioned between lenses 24 and 26 as discussed more fully below.